

Amendments to the Specification:

Please replace paragraph [0026] with the following amended paragraph:

[0026] The foregoing and/or further objects, features and advantages of the invention will become more apparent from the following description of preferred embodiments with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which like numerals are used to represent like elements and wherein:

FIG. 1 is a side view schematically showing a knee protection apparatus in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view showing the configuration of a knee airbag module, a panel, brackets, and an instrument panel reinforcement;

FIG. 3 is an sectional side view showing the knee airbag module shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is another side view schematically showing the knee protection apparatus shown in FIG 1 when the airbag is deploying;

FIG. 5 is another side view schematically showing the knee protection apparatus when the deployment of the airbag has been completed;

FIG. 6 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag support is provided to both the instrument panel side and the occupant side of the airbag;

FIG. 7 is a perspective view showing the airbag and the airbag support of FIG. 6 as viewed from the rear side of the vehicle;

FIG. 8 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where one end portion of the airbag support is temporarily fixed to the airbag using a double-daces tape;

FIG. 9 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where a cut-off line is provided at an intermediate portion of the airbag support;

FIG. 10 is a perspective view showing the airbag and the airbag support of FIG. 9 as viewed from the occupant's side;

FIG. 11 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the instrument panel side portion and the occupant side portion of the airbag support are temporarily fixed to each other using double-sided tape;

FIG. 12 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the instrument panel side portion and the occupant side portion of the airbag support are sewn and thus temporarily fixed to each other;

FIG. 13 is a sectional side view illustrating a case where the airbag support of FIG. 12 has expanded;

FIG. 14 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the instrument panel side portion and the occupant side portion of the airbag support are arranged such that the instrument panel side portion would expand before the occupant side portion upon deployment of the airbag;

FIG. 15 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag is first wrapped and stored into the airbag case, after which the instrument panel side portion and the occupant side portion of the airbag support are sequentially wound and stored into the same case;

FIG. 16 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag is first wrapped and stored into the airbag case, after which instrument panel side portion and the occupant side portion of the airbag support are folded like "bellows" and sequentially stored into the same case;

FIG. 17 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag support including the instrument panel side portion and the occupant side portion and the airbag are integrally formed of a common base cloth;

FIG. 18 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a stitch sewing the airbag and the airbag support together;

FIG. 19 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a stitch sewing the airbag and the airbag support together;

FIG. 20 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a stitch sewing the airbag and the airbag support together;

FIG. 21 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a stitch sewing the airbag and the airbag support together;

FIG. 22 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a stitch sewing the airbag and the airbag support together;

FIG. 22 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a portion of a stitch made to from the airbag;

FIG. 23 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the expansion guide is formed by a portion of a stitch sewing a tether to the airbag;

FIG. 24 is a view schematically illustrating one example where an adhered portion of the airbag support through which the airbag support is attached to the airbag is formed using

adhesive such that at least one portion of the adhered portion extends along a direction the airbag support would expand upon deployment of the airbag;

FIG. 25 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the adhered portion is formed;

FIG. 26 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the adhered portion is formed;

FIG. 27 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the adhered portion is formed;

FIG. 28 is a view schematically illustrating one example where a reinforcement is formed by a portion of the airbag support sewn into a specific form;

FIG. 29 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the reinforcement is formed by a portion of the airbag support sewn into a specific form;

FIG. 30 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the reinforcement is formed by a portion of the airbag support sewn into a specific form;

FIG. 31 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the reinforcement is formed by a portion of the airbag support at which a stitch is made;

FIG. 32 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the reinforcement is formed by a portion of the airbag support on which sealing substance is applied;

FIG. 33 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the reinforcement is formed by a portion of the airbag support on which sealing substance is applied;

FIG. 34 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag support is formed as one portion of the airbag cover;

FIG. 35 is a sectional side view showing a case where the airbag shown in FIG. 34 has been deployed;

FIG. 36 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag support and the airbag are integrally formed of a common base cloth;

FIG. 37 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag and the airbag support are wrapped separately and stored within the airbag case;

FIG. 38 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating another example where the airbag and the airbag support are wrapped separately and stored within the airbag case;

FIG. 39 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag support is attached at the bottom portion to the airbag, and the airbag support and the airbag are stored with the top portion of the airbag support separately wrapped from the airbag;

FIG. 40 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the airbag support is attached at the bottom portion to the airbag, and the airbag support and the airbag are stored with the top portion of the airbag support separately wrapped (folded) from the airbag;

FIG. 41 is a view schematically illustrating one example where an anchor portion is formed by the top portion of the airbag support that has been folded twice and sewn to the airbag support;

FIG. 42 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the anchor portion is formed by the top portion folded once and sewn to the airbag support so as to form a loop and a bar provided in that loop;

FIG. 43 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the anchor portion is formed by the top portion on which sealing substance is thinly applied;

FIG. 44 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the anchor portion is formed by the top portion of the airbag support where the sealing substance is additionally applied onto a thin layer of the same substance that has already been created throughout the entire surface of the airbag support;

FIG. 45 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the anchor portion is formed by the top portion of the airbag support on which the sealing substance is thickly applied;

FIG. 46 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the anchor portion is formed by the top portion of the airbag support on which two stitches have been made;

FIG. 47 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where a friction reducer is formed by a layer of sealing substance created on one side of the airbag support closer to the airbag;

FIG. 48 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the friction reducer is formed by overlapped portions of the airbag support;

FIG. 49 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating another example where the friction reducer is formed by overlapped portions of the airbag support;

~~FIG. 50 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating another example where the friction reducer is formed by overlapped portions of the airbag support;~~

FIG. ~~51-50~~ is a view schematically illustrating one example where the friction reducer is formed through an arrangement of the airbag support and the airbag where a weave direction

of base cloth of the airbag and a weave direction of base cloth of the airbag support are different;

FIG. ~~52~~51 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by forming a half-round notch substantially at the center of the same top side;

FIG. ~~53~~52 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by forming a V-shaped notch substantially at the center of the same top side;

FIG. ~~54~~53 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by forming a slit notch substantially at the center of the same top side;

FIG. ~~55~~54 is a view schematically showing a state where the airbag support of FIG. ~~54~~53, as viewed from the opposite side, has expanded;

FIG. ~~56~~55 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by forming the airbag support in a trapezoidal shape;

FIG. ~~57~~56 is a view schematically showing a state where the airbag support of FIG. ~~56~~55, as viewed from the opposite side, has expanded;

FIG. ~~58~~57 is a view schematically illustrating one example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by providing a portion of the airbag support folded in a fan-like shape;

FIG. ~~59~~58 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by providing a portion of the airbag support folded in a fan-like shape;

FIG. ~~60~~59 is a view schematically illustrating another example where the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support is made longer than the bottom side of the airbag support by providing a portion of the airbag support folded in a fan-like shape;

FIG. ~~61~~60 is a sectional side view schematically illustrating one example where the peripheral length of the top side of one portion of the airbag support is made longer than the top side of another portion of the airbag support when the airbag support has been split at a cut-off portion into those portions;

FIG. ~~62~~61 is a back view showing the airbag support and the airbag in FIG. ~~61~~60;

FIG. ~~63-62~~ is a sectional side view schematically illustrating another example where the peripheral length of the top side of one portion of the airbag support is made longer than the top side of another portion of the airbag support when the airbag support has been split at a cut-off portion into those portions; and

FIG. ~~64-63~~ is a back view showing the airbag support and the airbag in FIG. ~~63-62~~.

Please replace paragraphs [0064]-[0070] with the following amended paragraph:

[0064] Other examples are shown in FIGs. 47 to ~~51-50~~ where a friction reducer for reducing the friction between the airbag support 15 and the airbag 11 is provided to minimize the chances of the airbag support 15 being caught by the airbag 11 when the airbag support 15 expands upon deployment of the airbag 11. In the example of FIG. 47, the friction reducer is formed by a layer of sealing substance created between the airbag support 15 and the airbag 11. More specifically, the sealing substance is thinly applied to the airbag support 15 so that the layer of sealing substance is created between the airbag support 15 and the airbag 11. If the sealing substance is also applied to the airbag 11, the effect of smoothing the relative motions of the airbag 11 and the airbag support 15 can be further improved. Thus, in this case, the sealing substance can be utilized to reduce the friction between the airbag 11 and the airbag support 15.

[0065] Other examples are shown in FIGs. ~~48 and 49, 48 to 50~~, where the friction reducer is formed by two or more separate portions of the airbag support 15 that are overlapped or a portion of the airbag support 15 folded onto itself. With thus overlapped portions of the airbag support 15, the relative motions of the airbag 11 and the airbag support 15 are made smooth so that the airbag support 15 would smoothly and quickly expand with respect to the instrument panel.

[0066] Another example is shown in FIG. ~~51-50~~ where the friction reducer is formed by an arrangement of the airbag support 15 and the airbag 11 where their weave directions are different. This arrangement can be easily accomplished by appropriately setting the direction of cutting out the airbag support 15 from the base cloth, and a preferred effect of reducing the friction may be achieved by setting that direction appropriately.

[0067] Other examples are shown in FIGs. ~~52 to 60~~ 51 to 59 where the airbag support 15 is attached at the bottom portion 15a to the airbag 11 while the top portion 15b is free, and the peripheral length of the top side of the airbag support 15 is longer than the bottom side of

the airbag support 15. In the example of FIG. ~~52~~51, a half-round notch 15b1 is formed substantially at the center of the top side of the airbag support 15 so that the peripheral length of the top side is longer than the bottom side of the airbag support 15. In the example of FIG. ~~53~~52, likewise, a V-shaped notch 15b2 is formed substantially at the center of the top side of the airbag support 15 so that the peripheral length of the top side is longer than the bottom side of the airbag support 15.

[0068] In the example shown in FIGs. ~~54~~55~~53~~ and ~~54~~, a slit 15b3 of a predetermined length is made substantially at the center of the top portion 15b. Referring to FIG. ~~55~~54, the top portion 15b of the airbag support 15, upon deployment of the airbag 11, opens at the slit 15b3 when it contacts and is thus pressed by a protrusion, such as a steering column 30, so that the peripheral length of the top side becomes longer than the bottom side of the airbag support 15 as indicated in FIG. ~~55~~54. In the examples of FIGs. ~~56~~57~~55~~ and ~~56~~, the airbag support 15 is formed trapezoidal so that the length of the top side of the airbag support 15 is longer than the bottom side of the airbag support 15. In the examples of FIGs. ~~57~~ and ~~58~~58~~59~~, the top portion 15b of the airbag support 15 is formed like a "folding fan" so that the length of the top side of the airbag support 15 becomes longer than the bottom side when the airbag support 15 has expanded. In the example of FIG. ~~60~~59, the airbag support 15 is formed in a fan-like shape so that the length of top edge of the airbag support 15 is longer than the bottom side.

[0069] Other examples are shown in FIGs. ~~61 to 64~~60 to 63 where a cut-off line 15c is formed to split the airbag support 15 into two portions corresponding to the instrument panel side and the occupant side of the airbag 11, respectively. The cut-off line 15c is formed in such a shape that, when the airbag support has been split into such two portions, the peripheral length of the top side of one of the portions is longer than that of the other portion. For example, the center portion of the cut-off line 15c may be formed in a V-shape as shown FIGs. ~~63~~64~~62~~ and ~~63~~.

[0070] According to the examples of FIGs. ~~52 to 60~~51 to 59 where the length of the top side of the airbag support 15 is longer than its bottom side, and the examples of FIGs. ~~61 to 64~~60 to 63 where the top side of one of the two portions of the airbag support 15 is longer than that of the other portion, the airbag support 15, even if there is a protrusion like the steering column 30, can smoothly expand by avoiding that protrusion.